

ESP Employment Status: A Nineteen-Year Survey

By Vicki J. Rosser

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The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), a unit of the U.S. Department of Education, gathers human resource data on staff members at postsecondary institutions. Data accumulation is mandatory every other year; reporting between the required years is voluntary. Postsecondary staff members are defined by their primary function and occupational activity. NCES uses these position classifications: instruction/research/public service, executive/administrative/managerial, graduate assistants, support/service, technical/paraprofessional, clerical/secretarial, skilled crafts, and service/maintenance.

Five of these NCES occupational categories are classified as educational support professionals (ESPs): support/service, clerical/secretarial, technical/paraprofessional, skilled crafts, and service/maintenance.¹ ESPs, the largest employment group among postsecondary staff members, are often the first to face our students, colleagues, and the public.² They are

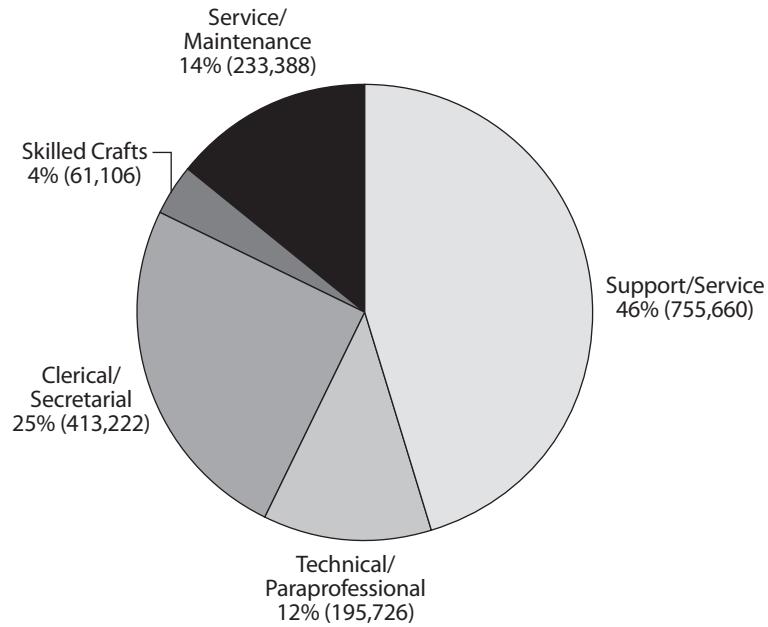
often called the backbone of the institution.³ Workers in the other categories come and go, but ESPs work long hours, remain on the job for many years, retain institutional memory, and contribute to the efficient and effective functioning of their units and their colleges.⁴

This essay provides the latest data on ESP workforce composition. It breaks down the data by institutional control (public or private), gender, race and ethnicity, and occupation. The essay then traces 19 years of ESP employment “ebb and flow” by position classification.

CURRENT STATUS

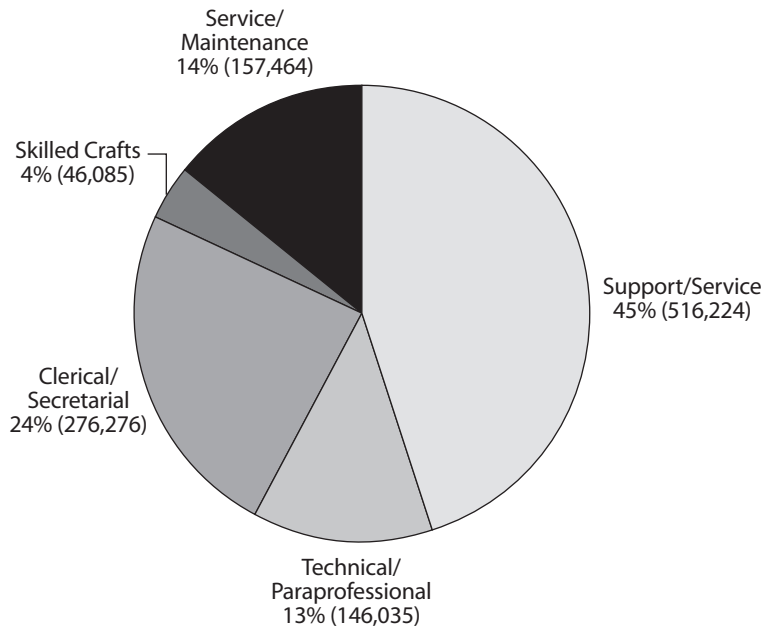
The latest available NCES data show that 1,659,102 ESPs worked in U.S. postsecondary institutions in Fall 2011 (Figure 1).⁵ The breakdown by category: support/service (755,660 or 46 percent), clerical/secretarial (413,222 or 25 percent), service/maintenance (233,388 or 14 percent), technical/paraprofessional (195,726 or 12 percent), and skilled crafts (61,106 or four percent).

Figure 1. Percent of Education Support Professionals (ESP) by Occupation: Fall 2011



Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions*, Fall 2011.

Figure 2. Percentage Distribution of ESP Staff by Occupation, Public Institutions: Fall 2011



Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions*, Fall 2011.

In Fall 2011, 1,142,084 ESPs worked in public institutions (Figure 2). The percentage distribution by category resembles the overall breakdown: support/service (516,224 or 45 percent), clerical/secretarial (276,276 or 24 percent), service/maintenance (157,464 or 14 percent), technical/paraprofessional (146,035 or 13 percent), and skilled crafts (46,085 or four percent).

Private institutions employ fewer ESPs (517,018; Figure 3), but the occupational categories follow a similar percentage distribution: support/service (239,436 or 46 percent), clerical/secretarial (136,946 or 26 percent), service/maintenance (75,924 or 15 percent), technical/paraprofessional (49,691 or ten percent), and skilled crafts (15,021 or three percent).

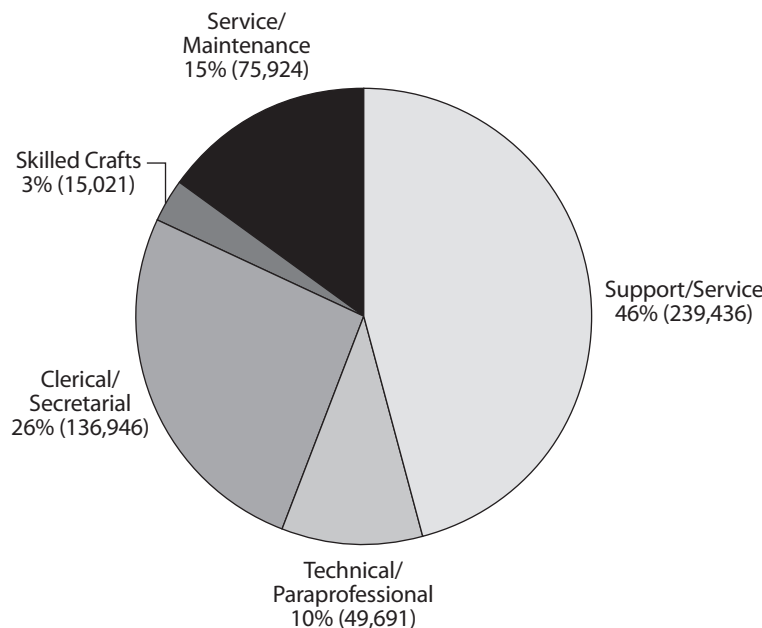
NINETEEN-YEAR TRENDS

Four ESP categories showed decreases in employment numbers and percentages between 2009 and 2011 (Figure 4): technical/paraprofessional (2,648 or -1.3 percent), service/

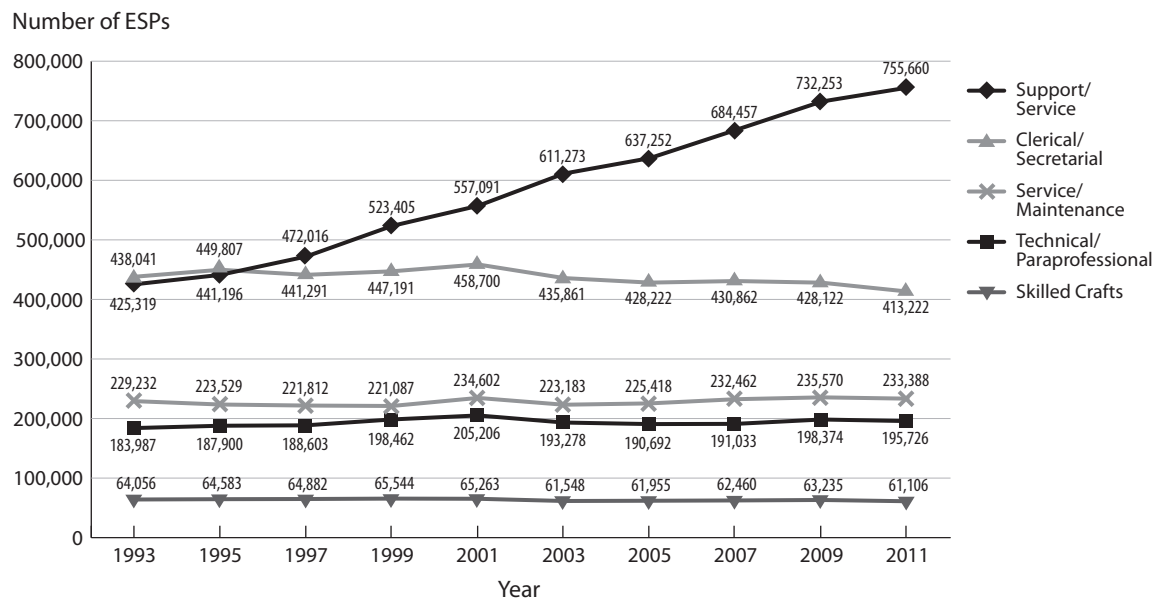
maintenance (2,182 or -0.9 percent), skilled crafts (2,129 or -3.4 percent), and clerical/secretarial (14,900 or -3.5 percent). The support/service category showed a hiring increase of 23,407 employees or 3.2 percent. The total decrease in employees (21,859) from the four ESP categories showing a decline virtually offsets the increase gained in support/service. The ESP category overall experienced negligible growth between 2009 and 2011.

Figure 4 also presents employment trends over the past 19 years, broken down by ESP occupational category (1993–2011).⁶ The trend in employment of support/service and clerical/secretarial workers diverged over these years. Support/service employees increased by 317,619 or 77.7 percent, while clerical/secretarial employees decreased by 12,097 or 5.7 percent. Relevant research suggests that hiring part-time or temporary employees, state mandated cost reductions, and merging and consolidating departments had a profound effect

Figure 3. Percentage Distribution of ESP Staff by Occupation, Private Institutions: Fall 2011



Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions*, Fall 2011.

Figure 4. Number of ESP Staff by Year: Fall 1993 through Fall 2011

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions*, Fall 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2011 data files, and *Salaries of Full-Time Instructional Faculty, 2003–04*, E.D. Tab, May 2005; Johnsrud and Banaria, 2005, 85–102.

on clerical/secretarial staff members.⁷ By contrast, increases in state and federal reporting requirements, and in human and special services resulted in an increase in support/service employees on college and university campuses.⁸

Employment in the technical/paraprofessional category grew by more than any other category between 1993 and 2011 (11,739 or 6.4 percent). But the number of employees in this category decreased since 2001 (9,480 or 4.6 percent). This decrease may have resulted from the implementation of campus wide Enterprise Resource Planning systems by 2002 to reduce technology costs.⁹

The number of service/maintenance employees increased slightly (4,156 or 1.8 percent)—little gain in actuality. The skilled craft category showed a decrease of 2,950 or 4.6 percent over the 19-year period. The negligible growth in service/maintenance and the decline in skilled crafts over time suggests the continual outsourcing of these highly skilled professions.¹⁰

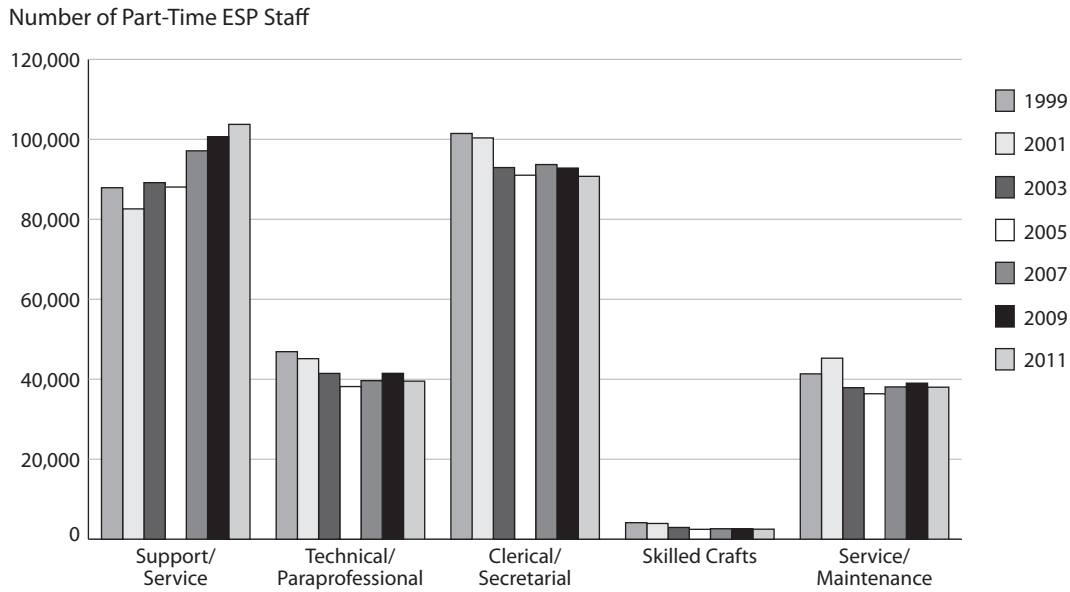
PART-TIME STATUS

The number of part-time ESP positions decreased by 2,019 (-0.7 percent; Figure 5) between 2009 and 2011: technical/paraprofessional 1,953 (-4.7 percent), clerical/secretarial 2,065 (-2.2 percent), skilled crafts 98 (-3.8 percent), and service/maintenance 1,003 (-2.6 percent). The support/service category showed a 3.1 percent increase, or 3,100 employees. These results reflect the downward trend in part-time ESP employment. The number of part-time positions decreased by 7,181 or 2.5 percent since 1999.

GENDER

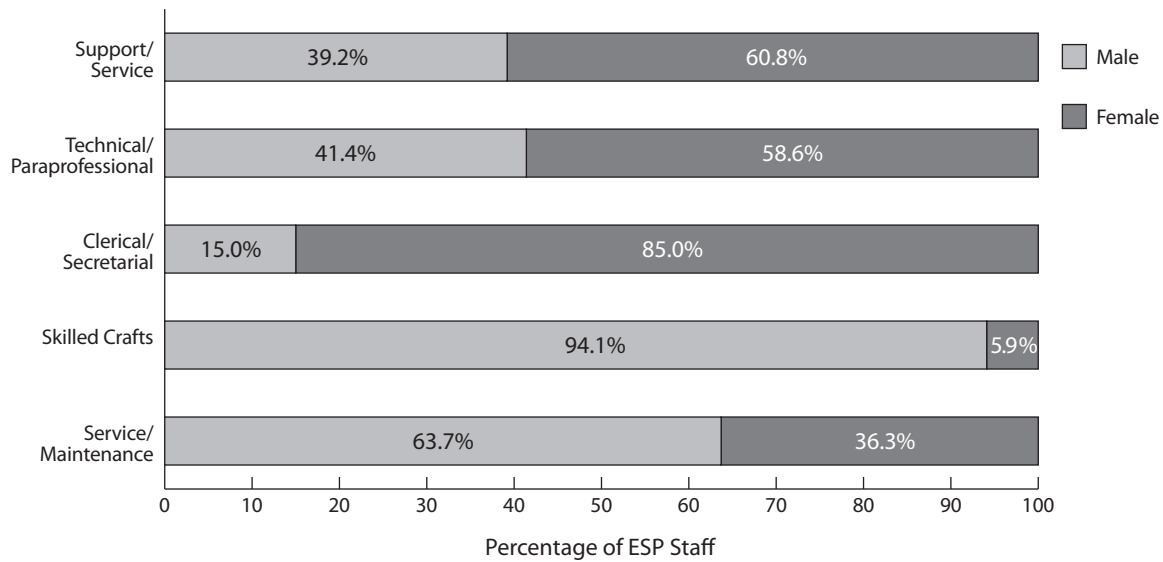
In 2011, males continued to outnumber females in two categories: service/maintenance (men=63.7 percent, women=36.3 percent) and skilled crafts (men=94.1 percent, women=5.9 percent). Women were employed in greater proportions in the other three categories (Figure 6): clerical/secretarial (women=85.0 percent,

Figure 5. Number of Part-Time ESP Staff: Fall 1999 to Fall 2011



Sources: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions*, Fall 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2011 data files, and *Salaries of Full-Time Instructional Faculty, 2003–04*, E.D. Tab, May 2005; Johnsrud and Banaria, 2005, 85–102.

Figure 6. Percentage of ESP Staff, by Gender and Occupation: Fall 2011



Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions*, Fall 2011.

men=15.0 percent), technical/paraprofessional (women=58.6 percent, men=41.4 percent), and support/service (women=60.8 percent, men=39.2 percent).

Table 1 presents changes in ESP staffing by gender and employment category. The number of women employees in the service/maintenance category decreased by 2.8 percent between 2009 and 2011. The number of men remained the same (+0.2 percent). Three categories showed greater declines for women than for men. The skilled crafts category showed a decrease for women and men (-13.7 percent and -2.6 percent, respectively). The decreases in the clerical/secretarial category were -4.0 percent for women and -0.6 percent for men. The respective decreases for women and men in the technical/paraprofessional category were

-1.8 percent and -0.7 percent. The only ESP category to show increases for women and men is support/service: 3.9 percent and 2.1 percent, respectively.

NEW HIRE STATUS

The number of ESP new full-time hires by degree-granting institutions in 2011 remained well below 2007 levels in all categories (Table 2). Total new full-time hires decreased by 10,936 or 13.2 percent (from 83,098 to 72,162) during this period. Clerical/secretarial positions showed the largest numerical decrease (5,453 or -27.1 percent), followed by service/maintenance (2,349 or -21.8 percent), skilled crafts (272 or -16.1 percent), support/service (1,393 or -34.2 percent), and technical/paraprofessional (1,469 or -14.8 percent).

Table 1. Number, and Percentage Change in Number, ESP Staff, by Gender and Occupation: 1993–2009

Occupation	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	Change: 1993 to 2011	Change: 2009 to 2011
Service/ Maintenance	229,232	223,529	221,812	221,087	234,602	223,183	225,418	232,462	235,570	233,388	1.8%	-0.9%
Female	88,168	86,183	84,791	85,087	90,406	83,795	83,957	86,926	87,258	84,820	-3.8	-2.8
Male	141,064	137,346	137,021	136,000	144,196	139,388	141,461	145,536	148,312	148,568	5.3	0.2
Skilled Crafts	64,065	64,583	64,882	65,544	65,263	61,548	61,955	62,460	63,235	61,106	-4.6	-3.4
Female	4,164	4,089	4,498	4,535	4,743	4,259	3,948	3,871	4,178	3,605	-13.4	-13.7
Male	59,901	60,494	60,384	61,009	60,520	57,289	58,007	58,589	59,057	57,501	-4.0	-2.6
Clerical/ Secretarial	438,041	441,196	441,291	447,191	458,700	435,861	428,222	430,862	428,122	413,222	-5.7	-3.5
Female	387,143	386,490	382,137	385,742	396,577	376,560	368,192	369,002	365,823	351,308	-9.3	-4.0
Male	50,898	54,706	59,154	61,449	62,123	59,301	60,030	61,860	62,299	61,914	21.6	-0.6
Technical/ Paraprofessional	183,987	187,900	188,603	198,492	205,206	193,278	190,692	191,033	198,374	195,726	6.4	-1.3
Female	110,746	111,904	112,721	118,020	121,159	114,758	112,325	112,674	116,757	114,675	3.5	-1.8
Male	73,241	75,996	75,882	80,472	84,047	78,520	78,367	78,359	81,617	81,051	10.7	-0.7
Support/ Service	425,319	449,807	472,016	523,405	557,091	611,273	637,252	684,457	732,253	755,660	77.7	3.2
Female	258,641	272,655	284,370	315,482	338,730	365,870	381,491	411,827	441,892	459,299	77.6	3.9
Male	166,678	177,152	187,646	207,923	218,361	245,403	255,761	272,630	290,361	296,361	77.8	2.1

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions*, Fall 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011 data files, and *Salaries of Full-Time Instructional Faculty, 2003–04*, E.D. Tab, May 2005; Johnsrud and Banaria, 2005, 85–102.

Table 2. New Hires by Race/Ethnicity and Employment Category: Fall 2007, 2009, and 2011

	Non-Resident Alien	Black, Non-Hispanic	American Indian, Alaskan Native	Asian, Pacific Islander	Hispanic	White, Non-Hispanic	Unknown	Two or More Races ^a	Total
Fall 2007									
	Number								
Support/Service	2,355	4,313	227	3,163	2,209	26,430	1,975	—	40,672
Technical/Paraprofessional	208	1,274	84	797	831	6,161	529	—	9,884
Clerical/Secretarial	121	3,113	149	842	2,069	12,888	900	—	20,082
Skilled Crafts	5	166	29	31	172	1,215	75	—	1,693
Service/Maintenance	97	2,805	103	296	1,493	5,576	397	—	10,767
Totals	2,786	11,671	592	5,126	6,774	52,270	3,876	—	83,098
	Percentage								
Support/Service	5.8%	10.6%	0.6%	7.8%	5.4%	65.0%	4.9%	—	100.0%
Technical/Paraprofessional	2.1	12.9	0.8	8.1	8.4	62.3	5.4	—	100.0
Clerical/Secretarial	0.6	15.5	0.7	4.2	10.3	64.2	4.5	—	100.0
Skilled Crafts	0.3	9.8	1.7	1.8	10.2	71.8	4.4	—	100.0
Service/Maintenance	0.9	26.1	1.0	2.7	13.9	51.8	3.7	—	100.0
Fall 2009									
	Number								
Support/Service	2,202	2,957	175	2,433	1,689	19,797	1,835	53	31,141
Technical/Paraprofessional	207	819	70	537	713	4,721	560	20	7,647
Clerical/Secretarial	73	1,364	80	448	1,189	7,448	569	35	11,206
Skilled Crafts	7	92	13	22	92	773	57	2	1,058
Service/Maintenance	72	1,463	68	151	798	3,800	349	12	6,713
Totals	2,561	6,695	406	3,591	4,481	36,539	3,370	122	57,765
	Percentage								
Support/Service	7.1%	9.5%	0.6%	7.8%	5.4%	63.6%	5.9%	0.2%	100.0%
Technical/Paraprofessional	2.7	10.7	0.9	7.0	9.3	61.7	7.3	0.3	100.0
Clerical/Secretarial	0.7	12.2	0.7	4.0	10.6	66.5	5.1	0.3	100.0
Skilled Crafts	0.7	8.7	1.2	2.1	8.7	73.1	5.4	0.2	100.0
Service/Maintenance	1.1	21.8	1.0	2.2	11.9	56.6	5.2	0.2	100.0
Fall 2011									
	Number								
Support/Service	1,990	3,777	192	2,746	2,226	25,813	2,112	423	39,279
Technical/Paraprofessional	196	1,062	68	662	700	5,279	346	102	8,415
Clerical/Secretarial	59	1,983	109	513	1,418	9,768	590	189	14,629
Skilled Crafts	10	116	12	16	114	1,079	65	9	1,421
Service/Maintenance	62	1,987	95	172	1,004	4,635	399	64	8,418
Totals	2,317	8,925	476	4,109	5,462	46,574	3,512	787	72,162
	Percentage								
Support/Service	5.1%	9.6%	0.5%	7.0%	5.7%	65.7%	5.4%	1.1%	100.0%
Technical/Paraprofessional	2.3	12.6	0.8	7.9	8.3	62.7	4.1	1.2	100.0
Clerical/Secretarial	0.4	13.6	0.7	3.5	9.7	66.8	4.0	1.3	100.0
Skilled Crafts	0.7	8.2	0.8	1.1	8.0	75.9	4.6	0.6	100.0
Service/Maintenance	0.7	23.6	1.1	2.0	11.9	55.1	4.7	0.8	100.0

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions*, Fall 2007, 2009, 2011 data files.

^a Category added to Race/Ethnicity options beginning in Fall 2008.

The modest increases in new ESP hires between 2009 and 2011 did not offset these declines. The total number of new ESP hires increased by 14,397 between 2009 and 2011 (from 57,765 to 72,162). All ESP classifications showed increases in new hires between 2009 and 2011. New jobs in support/service increased by 8,138 (from 31,141 to 39,279). The four remaining categories also showed increases: clerical/secretarial=3,661 (from 11,206 to 14,629), service/maintenance=1,705 (from 6,713 to 8,418), technical/paraprofessional=768 (from 7,647 to 8,415), and skilled crafts=363 (from 1,058 to 1,421).

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Table 2 also reports new hires by race/ethnicity and ESP employment category. White ESPs were still the largest racial/ethnic group among the five occupational categories in 2011 (46,574, range=55.1 to 75.9 percent). The next four categories: Black ESPs (8,925, range=8.2 to 23.6 percent), Hispanics (5,462, range=5.7 to 11.9 percent), Asian and Pacific Islanders (4,109, range=1.1 to 7.9 percent), and Native Americans (476, range=0.5 to 1.1 percent). Then followed “two or more races,” a new category (787, range=0.6 to 1.3), non-resident aliens (2,317, range=0.4 to 5.1 percent), and “unknowns” (3,512, range=4.0 to 5.4 percent).

All racial and ethnic categories showed decreases in the number of new full-time employees between 2007 and 2011: Blacks showed the largest percentage decrease (2,746 or 23.5 percent), followed by Asian and Pacific Islanders (1,017 or 19.8 percent), Native Americans (116 or 19.6 percent), Hispanics (1,312 or 19.4 percent), non-resident aliens (469 or 16.8 percent), Whites (5,696 or 10.9 percent), and unknowns (364 or 9.3 percent). The “two or more races” category, added in 2008, may have drawn its numbers from the unknown category. These reductions will affect position maintenance over the long term and continue to demoralize the remaining loyal, hard working professionals who must do much more with much less.¹¹

CONCLUSION

Only one ESP classification—support/service—showed an increase in employees from 2009 to 2011. Decreases in the remaining ESP categories virtually wiped out the gain in support/service positions.

Technical/paraprofessional employees showed a 6.4 percent increase from 1993 to 2011, but those increases quickly stalled as decreases began in earnest after 2001. Support/service showed a 77.7 percent increase from 1993 to 2011. The number of clerical/secretarial employees decreased by 5.7 percent over that period. Skilled crafts also showed a decrease (-4.6 percent). Service/maintenance, the final ESP category reported little gain (1.8 percent).

Needless to say, the up and down effect regarding hiring and position maintenance reflects where we stand regarding the inconsistent flow of financial support from local and state economies.

NOTES

¹ U.S. Department of Education, 2011.

² Johnsrud and Rosser, 2000.

³ Rosser, 2006.

⁴ Rosser, 2011.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, 2011.

⁶ Johnsrud and Banaria, 2005.

⁷ Rosser, 2011.

⁸ Johnsrud and Rosser, 2000.

⁹ Kvakik and Katz, 2002, Swartz and Orgill, 2001.

¹⁰ Johnsrud, 2000.

¹¹ Rosser, 2010, 2012.

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